United Nations S/PV.8255

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8255th meeting
Monday, 14 May 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Wronecka	(Poland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Djédjé
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Temenov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar (28 April to 2 May 2018)

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18-14604 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar (28 April to 2 May 2018)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Bangladesh and Myanmar to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the security Council shall hear briefings by the co-leads of the Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar from 26 April to 2 May, that is, the representatives of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Alotaibi.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I believe it goes without saying that first and foremost I would like to thank the Governments of Bangladesh and of Myanmar for their assistance and logistical support throughout our visit. The visit was short — somewhat of a whirlwind. Without the assistance provided with both Governments, the visit would never have been as successful as it was. I would therefore like to thank all the members that facilitated our mission, as well as my fellow co-leads. I will focus on the visit to Bangladesh.

On behalf of the Security Council, I would like to thank Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, who went to great pains to meet with us despite the fact that she had just returned from travelling abroad on the very morning of our meeting with her. In fact, the protocol services organized a meeting with her before she began her very busy day of work following her travel, That gave us an opportunity to hear Bangladesh's keen determination to find a solution to the Rohingya crisis.

On 28 April, the members of the Security Council arrived in Cox's Bazar to assess for themselves the tragic plight of the more than 1.2 million persons who are in need of humanitarian assistance. This is the most rapidly growing crisis of its kind in the world. Approximately 677,000 refugees from the Rohingya minority had joined the 300,000 others already displaced before the mass displacement of 25 August 2017.

We held two major talks: first with United Nations working group in Cox's Bazar and, secondly, with representatives of the Government of Bangladesh, represented by Mr. Mohammed Shahriar Alam, MP, Minister for Affairs of Bangladesh, and the personal representative of the Prime Minister. During that latter meeting, it became abundantly clear that the conditions for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees were not yet in place.

The working group called for more international support in the Rohynga crisis. While the humanitarian response plan has been established, calling for funding in the amount of $950 million, only 25 per cent of it is funded.

The Council mission expressed its concern about potential regional repercussions caused by the refugee crisis and the sheer size and magnitude of the refugee camps. It was made abundantly clear to us that the issue of citizenship needed to be addressed before refugees and displaced persons could return to Rakhine.

Our meeting with the Foreign Minister and other senior officials of the Bangladeshi Government made it clear that they stood ready to continue to provide humanitarian assistance where they could and to do all they could to prepare the refugee camps to withstand the forthcoming monsoon season.

The members of the Security Council then held a meeting with the Prime Minister to take stock of the tragedy from the Bangladeshi perspective. We heard that the international community will continue to assist Bangladesh in its efforts to try to aid the refugees. On her part, the Prime minister of Bangladesh expressed her gratitude to the members of the Security Council, who throughout their visit voiced their support for Bangladesh. The Prime Minister underscored once again that she and her Government would continue to provide assistance to the refugees and displaced persons and do all they could to ensure that they could return in a voluntary and dignified manner when appropriate and safe.

We then visited a refugee camp, where Council members were able to see at first hand the scale of the tragedy besetting the refugees and displaced persons upon arrival at the border. We met with refugees and saw their conditions along the zero line demarcating

the two countries. We saw many thousands of refugees and were able to see and hear for ourselves the sorry state of affairs of those who had lost their homes and, in the most tragic cases, members of their families.

The border guards of Bangladesh reported the arrival of a group of refugees, many of whom were injured, in recent days. The also shared with us images of victims who had obviously been injured by bombing and shelling before fleeing to the refugee camps. We also met local people who said that they were refugees from Myanmar having arrived earlier but with no national identity cards. They also reported that the Myanmar authorities were not upholding their rights, including those to freedom of movement, education, access to health care and employment — all of that, in addition to a national identity card, was being denied to them.

We then travelled to the largest refugee camp in the world — the Kutupalong camp, which hosts more than 600,000 refugees, half of them children. Council members met with victims of sexual violence, with orphans and with those who had fled scenes of their families being massacred and the razed remains of their villages. We heard first-hand accounts of the atrocities suffered by those people, and the horrors they had witnessed.

We also met with civil society and non-governmental organizations. Council members held two press conferences during our time in Bangladesh, in Cox's Bazar and Dhaka, where we answered questions from local and international journalists.

In my national capacity, I should now like to share a few observations and comments on the visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar. I promise to be brief, and will make further comments during the informal consultations scheduled to follow the present meeting.

First, we appreciate the cooperation provided by the Governments of Bangladesh and of Myanmar and all that they did to ensure that the Council's mission was a success. We look forward to enhanced cooperation between those two neighbouring countries to address and resolve the issue of Rohingya refugees.

We agree with the findings of the United Nations working group with regard to the potential widespread repercussions if the conditions in the camp deteriorate further. The Security Council must take measures to prevent the further exacerbation of the crisis and a deterioration of conditions, as they pose a direct threat to international peace and security. That is not only our own assessment but also that of the working group.

We encountered many women and children at the border. What made a true impression on me were the cries of those children who were still seeking their parents, having fled the violence in Rakhine state. Their sobs and cries will stay with me.

The Rohingya refugees shared with us that they had been refused national identity cards. We support their legitimate call for citizenship and recognition, and we call on the Government of Myanmar to address the issue beginning first of all with the question of citizenship being denied the Rohingya people.

The sheer scale of the destruction of villages in the north of Rakhine state shows that there were clear acts of organized and systematic violence targeting a minority that has committed no other crime than to be Muslim and a minority. We saw destruction, not just of a single house or three or four houses here and there, but large-scale destruction — the razing of houses and buildings. We think that, given the scale, it could very well amount to ethnic cleansing.

Those are the comments I wanted to make for the time being. As I said, I will make further comments and recommendations when we move to the informal consultations.

The President: I thank Ambassador Alotaibi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Meza-Cuadra.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Madam President, for convening today's important meeting on the recent visit by the members of the Security Council to Bangladesh and Myanmar. Peru considers it necessary for the international community and the Council follow the situation of the Rohingya Muslims in those countries with special attention.

As President of the Council in April, Peru had the honour of leading the visits, in conjunction with Kuwait and the United Kingdom. We would also like to acknowledge the role played by Poland, under whose presidency the trip we are reporting on today ended. It was a privilege to work with all of them. We owe special thanks to the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their warm welcome, to the United Nations country teams in both countries, to the Secretariat for its

unflagging assistance and to the Government of Kuwait for its generous logistical support, which facilitated the execution of our ambitious programme.

Following the briefing by my colleague the Permanent Representative of Kuwait on the activities in Bangladesh after a brief visit to his country, I will report on the main activities carried out on 30 April in Naypyidaw. We had an opportunity to meet with Myanmar's most senior officials and to convey the Council's positions in line with presidential statement S/PRST/2017/22, adopted unanimously by the Council last November (see S/PV.8085), as well as in line with the agreed terms of reference for the trip.

At our meeting with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she expressed her desire for a prompt return of the refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar before the monsoon season. In that regard, in her opinion, the process was being neglected due to complications with the required administrative forms. The State Counsellor stressed the importance for her Government of implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, which is the second-poorest region in Myanmar. She recognized the need to draft legislation like the 1982 citizenship act, but indicated that the process would take time. The State Counsellor also pointed to the need to create a climate of trust between communities to facilitate access for humanitarian agencies. She noted that the focus on Muslim minorities had led to a perception of discrimination against other communities.

During the dialogue, the members of the Council expressed their willingness to support the Government of Myanmar both in the process of voluntary refugee returns and in addressing the root causes of the crisis. It was also stressed that the Government of Myanmar had to allow full access to the United Nations and humanitarian agencies and collaborate with the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The State Counsellor was also informed, among other things, of the urgency of respecting the human rights of the Rohingya community, of resolving the issue of their citizenship and of allowing independent investigations in order to provide for accountability for crimes committed, and thereby promote reconciliation.

We then met with General Min Aung Hlaing, Commander-in-Chief of the Myanmar Armed Forces, who argued that the violence in Rakhine state was generated by attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and affected all communities in that region. With respect to the role of the armed forces, he said that they protected the country from external threats under direction of the civilian Government. In response to allegations of human rights violations, he said the armed forces had respected their international obligations and that internal accountability processes had been followed.

Council members stressed the need to ensure security in Rakhine state to allow for the voluntary return of refugees, who are still afraid to return. In that regard, the importance of cooperation with the United Nations, including with the Special Envoy, and with Bangladesh was stressed. The need for transparent investigations and the establishment of an independent accountability mechanism supported by the international community to address human rights violations in Rakhine state were also noted.

Also on 30 April, we met with the members of the Committee for Implementation of Recommendations of the Advisory Board on Rakhine State, who presented various initiatives to promote the economic development of the region. With regard to the return of refugees, the members of the Committee stressed that they were working on the issue and that the problems encountered should be resolved in bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh. They also made reference to the negotiations taking place for a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. Finally, we also held important meetings with the United Nations country team and civil society organizations.

Peru notes with deep concern the dramatic situation of vulnerability of Rohingya Muslims in both Myanmar and Bangladesh. We also stress the need for the international community to intensify its attention and assistance to this humanitarian crisis. We must also underline the need for an independent and transparent mechanism to ensure accountability for the numerous allegations of human rights violations, including numerous cases of violence and sexual abuse. We support the initiatives and efforts undertaken in that regard.

Finally, we stress the importance of strengthening the rule of law and democratic transition in Myanmar with a view to building confidence in its institutions,

reducing intercommunity tensions and promoting sustainable peace in Myanmar and the region.

The President: I thank Ambassador Meza-Cuadra for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Pierce.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): As this is the first time I personally take the floor this month, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming your new role. I would like to join my Peruvian colleague in thanking the Governments of Myanmar and of Bangladesh, but also our Kuwaiti colleague, for all the excellent arrangements for our trip. Without them, we would not have been able to cover so much. And like my Kuwaiti and Peruvian colleagues, we really did appreciate everything we saw through the United Nations teams on the ground and from the help we had from the Secretariat. If I can speak for the whole Security Council, I think all members found it a very productive and interesting, if difficult, visit.

I will speak about what we did on the third day, with our field visit to northern Rakhine. We had a briefing by the Chief Minister of Rakhine state, and we took a helicopter trip over northern Rakhine. We were accompanied by the Union Minister for International Cooperation, U Kyaw Tin, and the Chief Coordinator of the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine, Mr. Aung Tun Thet. The members of the Security Council flew over an area that showed widespread devastation of land and villages. It was clear that they had been burned out.

We saw physical arrangements for return being prepared by the Government of Myanmar, including a reception centre and a transit centre at Hla Phoe Khaung, which was intended to accommodate up to 30,000 people. We met members of local communities in northern Rakhine. We had a town hall meeting with Rakhine Muslim and Hindu groups. We met community members who had seen their families become victims of attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). We also met a Rohingya community whose homes are being rebuilt by the authorities. We were also able to hold a meeting with members of civil society at Sittwe airport, although, unfortunately, our time was brief.

As my colleagues just did, I would now like to offer the Council some reflections on what we saw.

First, we saw the sheer scale of the devastation. I have only ever seen one camp like it before in my professional life. I was very struck by the magnitude of what the refugees face, as well as the Government and the United Nations as they try to return the people home. We saw widespread devastation from the air, and that was, obviously, one reason for the scale of the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Secondly, the Burmese authorities need to increase the scale of their response and allow the United Nations in with unconditional access to assist them. Only the United Nations has the technical expertise and know-how to deal with an event of that magnitude. Myanmar has two reception centres. Together they can receive, at best, 300 people a day. There are approximately 900,000 refugees. The scale is nowhere near what would be required to bring so many refugees home. As I said, the United Nations needs to be involved because it is the only institution in the world that has the ability to provide assistance at the scale required.

Thirdly, we did not receive enough information about the prospect for long-term solutions. Council members heard that refugees would be housed only temporarily in the transit centre, but there was no convincing explanation about how they would actually return to their villages and in what time frame. We noted that the camps for internally displaced persons in Sittwe had been there since 2012, and I think the Council was struck by that fact.

Fourthly, there must be emphasis on the physical arrangements and development, as opposed to the underlying political issues. Council members heard about the plans for the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine, which are privately financed, and about the physical arrangements for repatriation. I would like to make two points to that end though, if I may. There are risks to private financing, and anything delivered without Rohingya participation risks reinforcing displacement, not resolving it. I think that we accept that the Myanmar authorities are deeply concerned about development issues in Rakhine state as a whole, and the Council believes that it is one aspect that will need to be addressed. But it is not the foremost aspect in getting the Rohingya to start going back to their homes in safety and security. I was particularly struck again by the contrast between what is being offered on the ground in Myanmar and the scale of the problem.

There was little progress on tackling the political issues, as my two colleagues noted in the meetings they described. Many of those political issues were raised in the Annan Commission recommendations. They centre around community reconciliation, regularizing citizenship status of the Rohingya, human rights — such as freedom of movement and access to education and livelihoods — and holding the perpetrators of violence to account.

Again, we heard from some of the other villagers and officials about attacks on them by ARSA. Speaking in my national capacity, it is clear to me that there needs to be an accountability mechanism for all alleged violations and abuses of human rights committed in northern Rakhine. But again, I start from the point that it is the Rohingya that the Council went to examine, and they are overwhelmingly the largest part of the problem.

In recent days we have been very concerned by reports that Myanmar security forces threatened Rohingya villages not to talk openly with the Security Council delegation, and tolde them that the people who did so were now being looked for by security forces. It is obviously unacceptable that anyone should feel intimidated to speak to the Security Council, which, after all, undertakes these missions on behalf of the international community. I would be most grateful if the Myanmar authorities could clarify that as a matter of urgency.

I would like to make one last point in conclusion, if I may. I was very struck by the unity of the Council throughout the trip, and I think that my colleagues were as well. We would all like to find a way to preserve that unity as we go forward under your direction, Madam President.

The President: I thank Ambassador Pierce for her briefing.

On behalf of the Council, I should like to express appreciation to all the members of the Security Council and the Secretariat who participated in the mission for the manner in which they discharged their important responsibilities.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I would like to join my colleague from the United Kingdom in congratulating you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. China also thanks you for convening this open meeting. I listened attentively to the briefings delivered by our colleagues from the United Kingdom, Kuwait and Peru.

With the concerted efforts of the Council members and in close consultation with the countries concerned, members of the Council recently visited Bangladesh and Myanmar. They held conversations with leaders, officials at various levels and the general public of both countries, where they also made field visits.

China deeply appreciates the reception the Council received by Bangladesh and Myanmar during its visit. The visit demonstrated the commitment and actions of the parties to resolve the issue through dialogue and cooperation, and set an example of unity and collaboration in the work of the Security Council. It played a positive role in the pursuit of a solution to the issue of Rakhine state. Through the visit, Council members gained an intimate and deeper understanding of the issue of Rakhine state, and its gravity and complexity.

Council members have all expressed concerns about the humanitarian situation of the displaced persons. At the same time, they saw the sincere efforts of Bangladesh and Myanmar to resolve the issue. Bangladesh has made enormous efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis, and the Government of Myanmar is ready for the return of the displaced persons. China has noted that, following the Council's visits, the countries concerned have made active efforts to further alleviate the situation.

The statement by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 May made it clear that the Government will sign a memorandum of understanding on the return of the displaced persons with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme as soon as possible. The State Counsellor herself visited Rakhine state. Myanmar has built transit sites and reception centres and settlement villages, and taken a host of measures to improve the conditions in Rakhine state.

Recently, the Government of Myanmar also sent a high-level delegation to Bangladesh to meet with the displaced persons and encourage them to return. The active efforts made by the countries concerned to launch the repatriation process should be fully recognized. Living conditions in Cox's Bazar could worsen in the wake of the imminent monsoon season. We must

pay close attention and do everything possible to prevent a massive humanitarian crisis. The pressing task is to push for substantive steps by Myanmar and Bangladesh to implement the bilateral arrangement, facilitate the timely return of the largest possible number of displaced persons and credibly improve the humanitarian situation of displaced persons in Bangladesh. We hope that Myanmar and Bangladesh will resolve any issues that might arise in implementing the bilateral arrangement through bilateral dialogue and consultations. The concerted efforts of Bangladesh and Myanmanr to resolve the relevant issues are not only in the fundamental and long-term interests of both countries, but also in the interests of the countries in the region.

Going forward, the international community should increase humanitarian assistance to Myanmar and Bangladesh. United Nations agencies should step up consultations with the Governments of the countries concerned and sign the relevant memorandum of understanding as soon as possible. We should work together to move forward the early implementation of the bilateral arrangement to facilitate the return of displaced persons. Efforts should be made to create an enabling external environment for the countries to properly resolve the issue through the bilateral channel and ensure that it does not drag on, become increasingly complicated or escalate.

This past week, the Security Council's press statement (SC/13331) on its visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh reaffirmed the Council's firm commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of Myanmar. It welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding and the relevant arrangement on the return of displaced persons from Rakhine state between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh and the commitment made by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 May. It urged the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to step up consultations and cooperation and implement the bilateral arrangement as soon as possible. The Council should continue to encourage Myanmar and Bangladesh to ramp up consultations and cooperation for the early implementation of the bilateral arrangement.

As a friendly neighbour of both Myanmar and Bangladesh, China has been following the situation in Rakhine state very closely. We have been working actively in response to emerging issues and have provided emergency humanitarian relief for the proper settlement of displaced persons. The three-phase solution to address the issue of Rakhine state proposed by Wang Yi, State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, during his visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh in November 2017 has been endorsed by both countries, and its implementation is well under way.

China will continue to play a constructive role in seeking a proper settlement to the issue of Rakhine state, which involves a complex historical, ethnic and religious background. Its solution requires long-term efforts. The international community should play a constructive role in creating the external conditions needed for facilitating consultations and dialogue between Myanmar and Bangladesh, thereby resolving real problems, maintaining long-term stability and achieving prosperity and development for Rakhine state. Now is the time for action.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I congratulate you once again, Madam President, on your presidency. I thank our colleagues from Kuwait, the United Kingdom and Peru for their work in arranging the visit. I also thank the Governments of Kuwait, Bangladesh and Burma for hosting the Security Council.

It was absolutely critical for the Security Council to see at first-hand the crisis in Rakhine state and the challenges facing Rohingya refugees. One of the main reasons for the trip is the continuing disheartening response from the Burmese Government. Judging from the reaction of the Government and the Burmese military, it seems as though they have failed to acknowledge their role in the crisis. That is unacceptable and unsustainable if we are to make any progress in ending the violence in Rakhine state.

We are thankful to the Government of Bangladesh for everything that it has done to support the Rohingya refugee population and for its willingness to work with the relevant United Nations agencies to meet their needs. International support for humanitarian assistance to the refugees in Bangladesh is more critical now than ever before. We must continue to support them. More than that, we must have the will as a Council to do something now. Time is not on our side.

The monsoon season has already begun and is putting hundreds of thousands of refugees at further risk. We must continue to work with Bangladesh and United Nations agencies to ensure that the refugees have what they need as the rain begins to fall, while

flooding the land beneath their feet and eroding the hills in which they shelter. We cannot allow the refugees to remain in unsafe and unsanitary conditions. The ultimate solution does not lie in Bangladesh. It is for the refugees to return to their homes and their own land. We, the Security Council, must remain focused on creating the conditions for the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingya people and of all displaced communities to their places of origin in Burma. We were glad to see some cooperation between the Governments of Bangladesh and Burma in achieving that goal, but the ultimate responsibility for creating such conditions rests squarely with Burmese authorities.

We appreciate the transparency of the Burmese Government demonstrated during the visit. However, Burma must do far more to accept its responsibilities and take the steps needed to end the crisis. Burma must work with the international community to focus on real solutions. That means focusing its energy on working with the United Nations and others to create the conditions on the ground that will reassure the Rohingya that they will be safe to return in a dignified and voluntary manner.

Justice is an essential precondition for the voluntary return of refugees. It is important for Burma to cooperate with credible, independent investigations into reports of atrocities. There needs to be accountability for the perpetrators, including those in the security services. Impunity cannot continue to be the order of the day. As part of that effort, the Burmese Government should allow access to the United Nations fact-finding mission and restore access for the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma.

Burma must also demonstrate respect for the fundamental human rights of the Rohingya, including respecting their freedom of movement and freedom of religion. It must address the conditions that are causing people to continue to flee Rakhine state. Burma needs to do more to address the root causes of the crisis by comprehensively implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, including those related to citizenship.

Burma also needs to recognize the scope of the physical and logistical challenges involved in creating the proper conditions for the safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable return for more than 1 million refugees. No country could handle that challenge alone, and Burma should accept the expert help that the relevant United Nations-mandated agencies have offered.

The United States stands ready to support Burma in addressing both the immediate crisis as well as a long-term solution. A democratic, pluralistic Government that protects the rights of all minority communities, including the Rohingya, is the only sustainable solution. As a sign of good faith, Burma should immediately sign the memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. Burma should also allow the United Nations and all other humanitarian partners immediate and unhindered access into Rakhine state. That is critical to building the confidence of not only the international community, but of the refugees.

As well, the Burmese Government should provide the media with immediate and unhindered access to Rakhine state, and provide for the protection of press freedoms, including the safety of journalists. We once again call on the Government of Burma to release the two Reuters journalists who remain jailed and on trial simply for reporting and documenting atrocities in Rakhin state.

The active involvement of the Security Council is essential to bring an end the Rohingya crisis. We know what we need to do. We cannot allow politics and short-term economic interests to keep us from doing what is right. We have unique tools to encourage Burma to take real steps towards resolving this crisis, and we must use them. We should move quickly to adopt a draft resolution that institutes real steps to resolve this enormous and growing humanitarian and human rights crisis. That, too, will be a challenge, as some members of the Council have kept us from taking action for cynical and self-interested reasons. Some undermine the unity of the Council demonstrated during the trip with unhelpful edits that only weaken the Council's message. We have all heard horrifying accounts of what the Rohingya people have suffered, what ethnic cleansing means to those on the ground. Now members of the Council have seen with their own eyes what the crisis has wrought. That leaves us with no choice but to act now.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I would like to begin by thanking the co-leads for organizing this important and timely mission. Allow me to also thank the Governments of both Bangladesh and Myanmar

for their cooperation, as well as the Secretariat and the United Nations country teams for their support.

The Council's visit allowed members to see for themselves the massive refugee crisis sparked by the widespread violence that has taken place in Rakhine state since last August, to hear at first-hand from those who fled the violence, as well as those who have remained in Rakhine, and to assess the situation in Myanmar and the possibility for voluntary, safe and dignified returns.

What the Council saw during its visit left an indelible mark. There was shock at the stories of the brutality suffered by the Rohingya. There was appreciation for the open and generous reception that refugees received in Bangladesh. And, there was alarm at the scale of the crisis and the response necessary. Ensuring the full implementation of the Council's presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22) remains relevant and urgent. The Council's visit demonstrated our determination to make sure that happens. The appointment by the Secretary-General of Christine Schraner Burgener as his Special Envoy for Myanmar is another step in that regard. We would like to express our strong support for the Special Envoy and her work.

The Council's visit serves to underline the need to remain seized of the situation and to increase our efforts to find a solution to the crisis. Several matters must now be urgently addressed.

First, we need to urgently respond to the needs of the refugees. We commend the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh and the communities hosting Rohingya refugees. As witnessed by the Council members, the immensity of the crisis means that they must have support to sustain the response needed. The upcoming monsoon rains will likely further exacerbate the difficult situation for the refugees. We encourage all States to continue and increase their support.

Secondly, we need to ensure that the conditions for voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns are created. It is clear that, for the process of returns to begin, conditions that allow for returns to be voluntary, secure and dignified, in line with international law and the principle of non-refoulment, must exist. It is essential that the root causes that led to the violence and displacement in the first place be addressed in full. During the Council's visit, it was clear that there exists an urgent need for security, reconstruction and livelihood programmes that benefit all communities in Rakhine. The implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State must be stepped-up, in close cooperation with international and regional partners, including seriously addressing the issue of citizenship.

Refugees told the Council that those who do decide to return voluntarily want to be able to do so to their place of origin. When conditions do allow for return, it is important to avoid setting up new internally displaced person camps or camp-like arrangements in Rakhine. Transition and reception centres need to be temporary. We encourage the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to expedite the ongoing bilateral consultations and efforts, and to implement the memorandum of understanding and agreement in a timely manner. International actors should continue to support the efforts to that end. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with its global mandate as the international refugee agency, must be associated with the process.

The stories Council members heard of sexual violence were harrowing. Particular attention must be given to the perspectives and special needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including protection needs in the return process.

Thirdly, United Nations access and engagement is essential. It is time for the Government of Myanmar to grant the United Nations, as well as other domestic and international non-governmental organizations, full and unhindered access to Rakhine state. We welcome the United Nations leadership on Rakhine under the Resident Coordinator. The memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and UNHCR should now be concluded as soon as possible. Access is also essential to support the implementation of the Advisory Commission's recommendations. In that regard, we welcome the renewed commitment to implement the Commission's recommendations and to work with the United Nations, as set out in the State Counsellor's press release of 1 May following her meeting with members of the Security Council.

Finally, numerous reports, including testimonies heard by Council members themselves, of systematic, widespread and coordinated acts of violence strongly indicate that crimes against humanity have been committed. Impunity for such crimes cannot be tolerated, and those responsible must be held to

account. All States have a responsibility to address and prevent violations of international law, including human rights violations and abuses. In this case the primary responsibility lies with the Government of Myanmar, which must genuinely address the issue of accountability. Otherwise, the international community will need to assist and look seriously into the possible mechanisms available for that purpose. We are aware of the ongoing process at the International Criminal Court. Without true accountability, the trust needed for refugees to return will be hard to garner. We fully support the work of the fact-finding mission, which should be given full and unhindered access to do its work. Evidence-gathering at Cox's Bazar could also prove to be an important contribution.

The visit was a demonstration of solidarity with the refugees sheltering in the camps in Bangladesh. There was a strong and clear call from the refugees for the Council's ongoing support and action. We must not let them down. The visit also represented solidarity with the Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi host communities, whom we must continue to support. The visit also represented commitment to supporting the Government of Myanmar to create the conditions for return and to build peace and prosperity for all people in Rakhine state. We invite them to fully engage with the United Nations agencies on the ground and with other regional and international partners. Sweden stands ready to continue to support Myanmar on its path towards democracy and peace.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by warmly thanking Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for their efforts in organizing and conducting this mission, which was a particularly important moment for all of us. I also thank Bangladesh and Burma for their hospitality.

The field visits, in particular to the zero line, Kutupalong camp and northern Rakhine, and the various interviews allowed Council members to determine for themselves the severity of the suffering of the Rohingya, the extent of the destruction in northern Rakhine and the complexity of the crisis and the urgency with which it must be resolved. I should like to give an overview of what France took away from the visit and the priorities that we believe should guide international action, in particular by the United Nations, in support of Rohingya refugees.

In Bangladesh, we witnessed the admirable efforts and generosity of the Government and of the local population, which, in all, are hosting more than 1 million Rohingya refugees, who are particularly vulnerable and live in very precarious conditions. That exemplary hospitality must be sustained. We also noted that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and all the relevant United Nations and humanitarian agencies and organizations are doing an outstanding job in that regard. For France, the immediate strengthening of international support would mean action on three fronts.

First, the funding rate for the humanitarian response plan must be increased, as it remains well below that required to meet current needs. According to the most recent assessment provided by UNHCR, the rate stands at 16 per cent.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for appropriate measures and steps to be taken to meet needs and protect the Rohingya in order to prepare for monsoon-related security and health risks in refugee camps. Such measures, which the Government of Bangladesh has started to take, include the reinforcement and relocation of shelters.

Thirdly, we must continue to assist Bangladesh, humanitarian workers and local host communities in ensuring that the living conditions of the Rohingya refugees are as bearable as possible, while preserving the promising national goal of economic development for Bangladesh. It is essential that specific attention be paid to the needs of children, including with regard to education, and of women who have suffered unspeakable violence.

Interviews in Burma served to reiterate the expectations of the Security Council to civil and military authorities, which are very clearly expressed in the presidential statement of 6 November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22). France's priority remains the full implementation of that statement. Commitments have been made, but that is not enough, as the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom just underscored. France therefore calls upon the Burmese authorities to take the following measures.

First, it is important to address the root causes of the crisis by fully cooperating with the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and by committing to implementing all of the recommendations in the Annan report. The Rohingya, whose nationality the Burmese

Government has withdrawn based on a law adopted in 1982, make up the largest group of stateless persons in the world. There can be no just or sustainable solution for their plight, or assurance of the rule of law in Burma, if they are not recognized as Burmese citizens and allowed to fully enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms. That will be achieved only when their citizenship is restored.

Secondly, the Burmese authorities must conduct investigations and prosecute those who commit systematic human rights abuses in Rakhine state, including sexual violence, and cooperate with the United Nations on the issue. The testimony heard by the members of the delegation on the violence and abuse suffered by the Rohingya is harrowing. The destruction observed in northern Rahkine state of homes, mosques and villages burned to the ground speaks for itself. The Rohingya are victims of ethnic cleansing; there is no other word for it. Prosecuting the perpetrators of such crimes is a moral, legal and political imperative. Starting today, the Burmese authorities can send a positive sign by agreeing to cooperate with the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission, establishing an on-site office of the High-Commissioner for Human Rights and cooperating with him.

Together we must also reflect on the best way to collect and protect evidence, which, when the time comes, will enable the perpetrators of such atrocities to be prosecuted in a fair and just trial with full respect for the law. France recalls that the forced displacement of people constitutes a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and we note that Bangladesh is party to it.

Thirdly, restoring immediate, safe and unhindered humanitarian access is imperative. It is essential that the Burmese authorities sign the memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme so as to demonstrate their commitment to respecting international standards on refugees. The onus is on the Burmese authorities to create conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees who, regrettably, are not all in the same location. Accepting technical assistance and expertise from the specialized agencies of the United Nations is the best way to achieve that goal. The challenges are real. Under no circumstances can inaction be justified. Specific commitments with regard to the points I just mentioned will serve to create the necessary conditions.

This year we mark the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which I recall was adopted following the genocide and massacre of the Second World War to prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy. Let me conclude by citing article 1.

> "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

I urge the Council to see reason and appeal to its conscience because the plight of the Rohingya underscores that respect for the most fundamental principle of the Charter of the United Nations is at stake. Its Preamble reaffirms faith in fundamental freedoms, dignity and the worth of the human person. The Security Council and we, the Members of the United Nations, are duty-bound to ensure respect for those principles.

Mr. Temenov (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking the three co-leads — the Permanent Representatives of Peru, Kuwait and the United Kingdom — for their detailed briefings on the Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar. I would like to express special gratitude to the Government of Kuwait for its generosity in providing flight arrangements and logistical support to the Security Council delegation. The mission would not have been possible without the joint efforts of the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar and of the United Nations country teams and other member States of the Council that worked very hard to make it happen.

On behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, I express gratitude to the host Governments for their assistance in organizing meetings with Government officials, as well as other stakeholders, including civil society representatives. It was a very special opportunity indeed to hold discussions with the highest authorities of both Governments on the issue of Rohingya refugees — the world's greatest and worst refugee crisis today.

The Security Council mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar was a vivid and stark revelation and an opportunity to obtain direct and first-hand experience of the true plight of the Rohingya people. Being on the front lines presented a glaring and shocking reality and

awakened our conscience, prompting us to act more robustly and collectively.

During the visit to the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, we were able to witness a severe humanitarian catastrophe that affects the entire region. We would like to commend the Government of Bangladesh on its generous hospitality in receiving such a large number of refugees and providing them with shelter and other forms of assistance. We hope that the Government of Bangladesh, as well as the United Nations and other humanitarian partners, will continue to undertake monsoon-preparedness activities to mitigate the effects of the rains on refugees and prevent a high number of human casualties. That is especially relevant given that 60 per cent of the Rohingya refugees are children, including 41 per cent who are under the age of 12, and therefore particularly vulnerable to emergency situations.

We noted the efforts of the Government of Myanmar to find a solution to the issue of Rohingya refugees and its preparations for their repatriation. We understand that the crisis cannot be solved overnight and will be an arduous process that will demand the active participation of all stakeholders. Given the magnitude of the problem, the repatriation of refugees will be a most formidable task and will require concerted efforts on the part of many organizations, countries and actors. We therefore hope that the Government of Myanmar will continue to cooperate with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Gradually, other relevant United Nations agencies, international donors and partners should be able to lend the necessary support. We see the beginning of efforts by Myanmar and would encourage that they be directed at establishing the rule of law and good governance.

One of the most critical problems is ensuring the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in Rakhine state. As underlined by my delegation during previous meetings on the issue, there can be no lasting solution for the Rohingya issue without addressing the root causes of the crisis. They include primarily the issues of citizenship for the Rohingya people, the restoration of their rights and freedoms, poverty alleviation and development, access to education, employment and freedom of movement.

It is hoped that the visit by the Security Council will pave the way for closer cooperation and finding long-term solutions through truth, reconciliation and transitional justice, as occurs after every conflict. With the United Nations fact-finding mission at work, we realize that justice is a precondition for re-establishing trust among all communities and deterring future violence.

Unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to the affected population is crucial. We hope that the goodwill created by the visit will result in unfettered and safe access to United Nations agencies offering emergency assistance and seeking to alleviate suffering, in particular of children, women and the elderly.

The Red Cross Movement, which has been providing humanitarian assistance in northern Rakhine at the request of the Government, cannot meet all the needs. We therefore call on the Government of Myanmar to allow full and safe access to Rakhine for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organizaiton, UNICEF and other United Nations agencies to effectively deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance.

We are encouraged by the commitment of the Government of Myanmar to working with the United Nations, and to endorsing and implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission in order to restore intercommunal harmony, sustainable peace, stability and prosperity. We are confident that the new Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, will bring new impetus for enhanced cooperation with the United Nations, and we hope that Naypyidaw will fully support the Special Envoy in discharging her mandate.

My delegation is committed to joining efforts to find a sustainable solution to the plight of the Rohingya refugees and people affected by the recent crisis and mass displacement.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, our delegation would like to express its deep gratitude and appreciation to Peru, Kuwait and the United Kingdom, through their Ambassadors Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Mansour Alotaibi and Karen Pierce, for the briefings they have just presented and for organizing the very important mission to visit Cox's Bazar, Dhaka, Naypyidaw and Rakhine state. The mission enabled the members of the Security Council to see and hear first-hand the reality

of the situation of the Rohingya refugees in the places we visited, through direct interaction with refugees, the political and military authorities and members of civil society and the United Nations system in Bangladesh and Myanmar. I would also like to place on record our gratitude to the Government of Kuwait for the important and helpful logistical support it provided to the mission, which went a long way to ensuring that it was carried out under good conditions and within the time available. We also express our appreciation to the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar and the United Nations system for all their support to the mission. I would also like to thank Mr. Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner for Refugees, for his detailed and informative briefings during the mission.

While I do not want to sound too melodramatic, I have to say that what I experienced, observed and heard during our visit to the zero line, both inside Myanmar's territory and in Cox's Bazar, left a deep impression on me, as I had never seen first-hand a situation of human suffering comparable to that in both places, where hundreds of thousands of the more than 1.2 million refugees were crowded together like sardines in tins and in very precarious conditions with regard to health care, food and accommodation. Our exchanges with refugees and members of the United Nations agencies opened our eyes to the extent of the tragedy that these refugees have continued to endure since their departure from Rakhine state.

The humanitarian tragedy is not limited to the refugee population but is also having a broad impact on the people of Bangladesh who are hosting the refugees. Despite the fact that their meagre means of livelihood and their environment have been severely damaged, they have nevertheless the burden with grace and generosity. In that connection, I would like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the people and Government of Bangladesh for taking that on and for the sacrifices they have made in spite of their own precarious situation. I would also like to take this opportunity to make an urgent appeal to the international community to support the Government of Bangladesh with all means necessary to address the critical situation that both its own people and the Rohingya refugees are facing, which threatens to deteriorate even further with the upcoming rainy season.

As we already mentioned in our talks with the political and military authorities of Myanmar, and in line with the Council's press statement of November 2017 (S/PRST/2017/22), we would like to reiterate our call for every effort to be made to ensure the dignified return of all Myanmar citizens who have been forced to flee to Bangladesh. After what we have seen, experienced and heard, we in the Council must find better solutions so that the hope that our visit gave the refugees can be transformed into reality through ongoing contact with both Governments to facilitate the necessary agreements, memorandums of understanding, mechanisms and procedures for returning the refugees to the places they were forced to leave. In that regard, we hope that the Government of Myanmar will cooperate and resolutely support Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener, and will allow United Nations agencies access to every region of the country, especially Rakhine state, so that they can support the repatriation and resettlement process for refugees.

In conclusion, I would like to sincerely thank all of the United Nations agencies and the staff of the Security Council Affairs Division for the effective support they provided throughout the development of the mission.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Security Council mission to Myanmar and Bangladesh was very timely and useful. Council members were able to personally assess the situation in Rakhine state and its surroundings, as well as the efforts that have been made to stabilize the situation. We would like to thank the authorities of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their efforts. We are also grateful to both the Polish and Peruvian presidencies, as well as Kuwait, without whose logistical support we could not have fully carried out our programme. It was extremely important that as a result of the mission, the Council was able to agree on a consensus press statement (SC/13331), which outlines the Security Council's position with regard to the crisis and the priority measures that the parties involved should take to overcome it.

We note that while the situation in the region remains difficult, in general it is under control. However, I would like to note the constructive attitude that Naypyidaw and Dhaka have shown in addressing this difficult situation, as well as their openness to dialogue and cooperation with the international community. All of us, without exception, have expressed our wholehearted solidarity with the Government and the people of Bangladesh, who have been dealing with unprecedented humanitarian crises and challenges, and

yet who have opened their doors and hearts to hundreds of thousands of people in dire straits.

I would also like to note that the Myanmar authorities did not try to conceal anything or avoid uncomfortable discussions. On the contrary, they demonstrated exceptional transparency. The Council was able to visit the most problematic areas and to talk openly with all parties, as I hope all my Security Council colleagues will confirm. The repeatedly expressed commitment of Myanmar officials to fully implementing the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission led by Kofi Annan and the provisions of the bilateral agreement with Bangladesh on the return of refugees is also grounds for some optimism.

Separately, we should also to underscore the readiness of Naypyidaw to cooperate with United Nations humanitarian agencies and its partners, and the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme testifies to that. Another positive fact is the expansion of access to Rakhine state to foreign observers. We would also like to commend the Myanmar authorities' systematic efforts to deal with the area's socioeconomic problems. As I have already said, we greatly appreciate the efforts of the Government of Bangladesh in taking on a very heavy burden and hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from Myanmar in an extremely timely demonstration of solidarity. In that connection, the international community must provide appropriate support to the Dhaka authorities so that they can contain the acute humanitarian consequences of the crisis. Nor should we forget that Myanmar will also require similar support as refugees return. For its part, in 2018 and 2019 the Russian Federation will allocate resources to both countries through the World Food Programme. We believe that humanitarian assistance to forced refugees should not be provided by imposing political conditions but rather should in strict accordance with United Nations principles, as defined by General Assembly resolution 46/182.

First and foremost, we believe that this crisis must be resolved through bilateral negotiations between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Considering its scale, a rapid solution is unlikely. There are many sides to the complex and deep-seated problems in Rakhine state, which can be resolved only through exclusively peaceful political and diplomatic means, by establishing a dialogue between the Naypyidaw and Dhaka authorities and involving representatives of every faith and nationality.

The international community should focus on helping the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to find practical solutions. It will be very important to ensure that Myanmar and Bangladesh consider accusations of sexual violence and abuses of human rights in the legal arena, based not on statements in the media or on social media but on evidence that both countries must come up with. More than once during the Security Council's visit, the Myanmar authorities stated that they had no intention of ignoring such issues or protecting the guilty. In order to expedite the related legal proceedings, Naypyidaw has proposed that refugees submit their claims to the courts in Myanmar, and they are ready to closely coordinate efforts with Dhaka to do that. We believe that is a step in the right direction and would be a concrete, practical measure towards combating impunity that will need the international community's support.

Politicizing the refugee crisis should be avoided. Any attempts by external actors to exploit it in order to achieve unrelated political aims are unacceptable. It is important to help Naypyidaw and Dhaka to reach a settlement that takes their concerns into account, including with regard to fighting extremism and terrorism, and that was our mission's main task. It will be crucial to create conditions that will enable the safe and dignified repatriation of refugees to their homes, and we believe that will be possible only through the constructive involvement of the authorities of both States in the process. In our view, it is essential to offer assistance to the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in dealing with the Rakhine state crisis in a spirit of equality and mutual respect. We hope that all concerned will act responsibly and prudently in order to ensure that the crisis does not escalate once again.

We are all well aware that the situation in the region is extremely precarious and that monsoon season is right around the corner, which could complicate things even further. However, we believe firmly that the ground has been prepared for a successful solution to the crisis. We have Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener, recently appointed as Special Envoy by Secretary-General Guterres, who must be given time to get things done. We have the understanding that Naypyidaw and Dhaka have expressed of the importance of joint efforts. Lastly, we have a unified Council, as expressed in our press statement. Bearing all of that in mind, I believe that in the course of the visit we were able to lay a pretty good foundation for the Bangladesh and Myanmar

authorities to start actively resolving their problems with the concerned and constructive cooperation of the international community as a whole and the Security Council in particular.

I would like to underscore that to do that it will be important to cherish and strengthen the unity of the Security Council, which enabled us to agree on a press statement fairly quickly. I hope that all Council members understand that and will not be tempted to use the situation to pursue their own domestic political aims. That would definitely not help to resolve the refugee crisis.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for their briefings on our joint Security Council visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar, and to join others in thanking them for organizing and co-leading the visit. We were also glad to do our part during the March presidency of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to facilitate discussions to make the visit to both countries possible. It provided an opportunity to assess the progress made in implementing the Council's November presidential statement (S/PRST/2017/22) and to inform the Council's further engagement. We are grateful to the Governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their hospitality and willingness to engage with the Council. I would also like to warmly thank all the United Nations staff who were involved in organizing the visit and producing the briefings. I would like to address three aspects of the issue, starting with the impressions we had from the visit; secondly, the immediate steps to be taken; and thirdly, the urgent need for accountability for crimes against the Rohingya.

The visit left a deep impression on us all. We were particularly shocked by the scale of the crisis, the number of refugees and the extent of the destruction of their villages. In Cox's Bazar we heard horrifying accounts from survivors of the violence. We met a woman holding a 16-day-old baby who looked as if she did not know what to do with it. She had been raped the night that her husband was killed and did not know who the baby's father was. We met an elderly woman who saw members of her family being raped and was then raped herself. We met a girl aged seven or eight with deep scars on her skull inflicted by knives and cuts. Imagine doing that to a child. We met a girl about 12 years old whose upper thigh had been ripped open by a bullet and who was now paralysed and unable to go to school. We met children who had no dreams for the future, just the past to deal with. Several of them had lost their parents and had to cope with that alone.

We also witnessed the hospitality of the people and the Government of Bangladesh in hosting almost 1 million Rohingya refugees. Their generosity deserves our deep appreciation and support. At the same time, with the monsoon season almost upon us, the challenges in the camps should not be underestimated by any of us. Swift action is required to prepare the camps for the imminent possibility of floods and landslides. The United Nations joint response plan is seriously underfunded. It is therefore essential that the international community step up its aid.

The second aspect is the immediate steps to be taken. Coming back from the visit, we cannot conclude other than that the outlook for a swift solution to the crisis remains bleak. Much needs to be done before the Rohingya can return safely and in a voluntary and dignified manner. The Council's presidential statement of November, which was reaffirmed in a press statement (SC/13331) following the visit, is far from being implemented.

Quick steps can be taken to show that Myanmar is truly committed. We call on the Myanmar authorities to allow full access to the United Nations and humanitarian organizations. The swift conclusion of talks on a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme would be an encouraging first step. Furthermore, initial efforts to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State — the Annan Commission — need to be followed up with meaningful and concrete steps — steps towards recognition, protection and citizenship for the Rohingya.

The third aspect is the need for accountability. For every member of the Rohingya community with whom I spoke, justice featured high on their list of needs for them to feel safe enough to return. Without addressing the crimes committed against the Rohinyga, the decades-old cycle of violence and discrimination cannot be broken. We welcome the expressed commitment of the Myanmar authorities to facilitate independent and credible investigations.

As a first step, we call on Myanmar to allow access to the fact-finding nission, as well as to the Special Rapporteur. Furthermore, we call on Myanmar to

become a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court or to accept the jurisdiction of the Court in accordance with paragraph 3, article 12, of the Rome Statute. We hope for swift and decisive action in that regard. Otherwise, it will be up to the international community to shoulder its responsibility and to consider further steps to bring about accountability, including referral to the International Criminal Court.

The visit has made it clear to all of us that the continued engagement and support of the international community is needed, including through the newly appointed Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The Kingdom of the Netherlands stands ready to play its part and to support the decisive engagement of the Council through a draft resolution that reflects the large scale of the crisis.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Poland.

Allow me to start by thanking our colleagues the Ambassadors of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for their very comprehensive briefings and for their efforts in organizing the visit. I would also like to express my gratitude to the authorities of Kuwait for their generosity and for facilitating our mission, and to the authorities of Bangladesh and Myanmar for their hospitality.

The Security Council visit to the region should really be seen as the success of the two or so previous Council presidencies. Thanks to their commitment, we were able to witness the humanitarian situation on the ground. What we saw in Cox's Bazar was a true eye-opener. The scale of the crisis is horrifying, and it will not change in any way for the better during the monsoon season. There is a race against the clock in the refugee camps, and we are collectively losing it.

We believe that the Council's visit can serve as a trigger for more robust Council action. Council members are obliged to take action and to respond with concrete solutions followed by thorough financial and material support for not only the refugees but also the host communities in Bangladesh. In that regard, I want to thank the authorities of Bangladesh and the host communities for their efforts in easing the heavy burden of the Rohingya refugees.

We call on the Myanmar authorities to grant full and unhindered access for United Nations agencies to Rakhine state and to develop close cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Programme. We further call for Myanmar to commit to addressing the recommendations of the Annan Commission.

Lastly, we hope that after voluntary repatriation, the Rohingya community will be properly reintegrated into society with unrestricted access to health-care services and basic education for all, including women and children.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): My delegation wishes to congratulate you, Madam President, on Poland's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We have full confidence in your wisdom and able leadership. I assure you of our full support and cooperation.

My Government welcomed the visit of the members of the Security Council to Myanmar in the hope that the visit would help them to better understand the situation on the ground so that we can further strengthen our cooperation with the United Nations in our efforts for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the displaced persons. We believe that we will be able to overcome the serious challenges that we face today by working in partnership with the United Nations. We trust in its constructive engagement and cooperation based on the principles of objectivity, mutual respect and understanding. We also hope that the visit will give strong impetus to our bilateral efforts with Bangladesh for the implementation of the repatriation process.

We facilitated the Security Council's visit to the fullest extent possible within the available time frame of the Council. The State Counsellor saw the visit as an important turning point. She reaffirmed the commitment of the Myanmar Government to bringing about peace, stability and development in Rakhine state.

In resolving the current issues relating to Rakhine state, we all agree that the most urgent task right now is to start the repatriation of the displaced persons in accordance with the bilateral agreements. We have repeatedly stated that we want to start the repatriation process as soon as possible, as we are ready to receive the returnees. Recently, on 8 May, the Ambassador of Bangladesh to Myanmar, Mr. Manjurul Karim

Khan Chowdhury, was summoned to Nay Pyi Taw and reminded of Myanmar's readiness to commence the repatriation of verified displaced persons before the monsoon, as agreed by the two Governments. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs once again urged Bangladesh to implement the bilateral agreement and to repatriate those who are already verified so that they can return to their villages in Rakhine. The Ambassador was also reminded to send the lists of displaced persons, using the right forms, as agreed in the physical arrangement for repatriation.

The forms used by Bangladesh were not those prescribed in the physical arrangement. They did not contain the signatures, fingerprints and proper photographs necessary for the proper verification and assurance of consent. We had already requested the Bangladesh side, on three separate occasions through diplomatic channels, to forward the duly completed prescribed forms that would enable displaced persons to be repatriated under the principle of voluntary, safe and dignified return.

Prior to the Security Council visit to Myanmar, the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar visited Cox's Bazar refugee camps and met with the displaced persons. He explained the resettlement programme for returnees to them and provided information on the repatriation process. To our surprise, they were not at all aware of the repatriation process. Apparently, they had not been notified by the Bangladesh authorities about the current bilateral arrangements or provided any of the forms required for the repatriation process. During the visit, the Minister could not meet the persons whom we have verified for repatriation, despite our request that such a meeting be arranged.

While we are trying to solve the issue in good faith through bilateral cooperation, it is most regrettable that, instead of fulfilling its commitment for the repatriation of the displaced persons as per the bilateral agreements, the Bangladesh side has deliberately made one excuse after another to stall the repatriation process. Bangladesh has been distorting the facts and telling the whole world that Myanmar is not willing to accept the return of the displaced persons. Bangladesh is altering the truth and vilifying the Government and the people of Myanmar to solicit international condemnation and exert maximum political pressure on Myanmar. We need the full and sincere cooperation of the Government of Bangladesh if the repatriation process is to be successful.

In that connection, I would like to refer to the remark made by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait concerning the illegal occupation on both sides of the international border. Human habitation and the building of any structure within 150 feet of the international border is prohibited by our bilateral border agreement. We have therefore filed our objection with the Bangladeshi side regarding the construction of bunkers and houses in the restricted areas on their side of the border. We have also learned that the Bangladesh side is helping illegal occupants on our side of the border in building shelters, which is a violation of Myanmar's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We notified them that such actions should cease immediately.

Allow me to turn to the matter of accountability. The Government of Myanmar has stated time and again that no violation of human rights will be condoned. Allegations supported by evidence will be investigated and action taken in accordance with the law. You may recall, Madam President, that, during your meeting with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she condemned all violence and reassured you of our readiness to take actions on the alleged human rights violations in Rakhine if the necessary information is provided. She reiterated that security assurances would be given to anyone who wishes to bring to court in Myanmar cases regarding violations of rights.

Moreover, the Commander-in-Chief also told the members of the Council that the Tatmadaw would welcome any alleged survivor of sexual violence who could bring hard evidence of the crime committed so that the perpetrators can be held accountable. He also mentioned that the Tatmadaw has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against any sexual violence committed by members of the armed forces.

When it comes to human rights abuses and violations, we should not forget the fact that the current humanitarian problem was the result of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) terrorist attacks on 30 border guard posts in northern Rakhine. The root cause of the latest crisis and the brutal killings and atrocities committed by the terrorists on innocent ethnic Hindu, Rakhine Buddhists and other minority tribes had been ignored by the Western media. The truth has been suppressed by incessant sensational arguments and Muslim victimhood narratives. Only a

balanced and constructive approach can lead us to the right solution of the extremely complex and politically sensitive problem of Rakhine state.

During the Security Council visit to Maungdaw on 1 May, approximately20 Rakhine, Mro, Maramar and Hindus waited for the Council members at the township administrative office for an opportunity to testify as to their experience of ARSA terrorist atrocities. Due to the limited time, only one Rakhine woman and one Hindu woman were able to talk about human rights abuses and atrocities perpetrated by ARSA terrorists. Sadly, many tragic stories of the ethnic people in Rakhine have fallen on the deaf ears of some who wanted to listen to only one side of the story of their choosing.

Those people witnessed the atrocities committed by ARSA terrorists, including the killing of seven Mro ethnic people in Khon-Taing village of Maungtaw township on 28 August 2017 and the subsequent torching of 2,625 houses in the area. They also testified as to the horrific discovery of a mass grave found near Yebawkya village on 28 September 2017, where 45 bodies of Hindus were discovered among the hundred kidnapped by ARSA. Those ethnic people in Maungtaw area are traumatized by these brutal terrorist acts. They all feel insecure as minority groups in their own land as a result of the fear instilled by ARSA. ARSA must also be held accountable for atrocities committed against the civilian population in Rakhine. The investigation of violations must include cases of terrorist atrocities as well.

We are seriously concerned that Bangladesh is unwittingly allowing extremism to rear its ugly head in that part of the region. ARSA already has a foothold in the camps, which soon will become a stronghold of terrorism and extremism. Recently, on 9 May, a group of four to six terrorists entered one of the refugee camps in Balukali and dragged 46-year-old Mohamed Faisal Ulhaq out of the camp and stabbed him to death. He had reportedly been advocating returning to Rakhine among his fellow displaced persons.

We have made every effort to put in place an environment conducive to the return of displaced people. Convinced that the engagement of United Nations agencies in Rakhine will strengthen our ability to ensure safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation, we are in the process of active discussions on a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Those agencies will be working alongside Myanmar ministries concerned and the Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development for the good of all communities in Rakhine.

At the same time, we shall also be dealing with the root causes of the recent violence. The recommendations of the Annan Commission set out practical measures necessary to achieve development for all communities in Rakhine. Of the 88 recommendations by the Annan Commission and the 48 by the national investigation commission, many overlap. Fifty-seven will be fulfilled very soon, while 31 are still being processed. The first report of the Implementation Committee was issued in February 2018, and the second will appear in May. Since the submission of Mr. Annan's final report, three camps for internally displaced persons have been relocated, and another four will be closed very soon.

With regard to the issuance of national verification cards, false information has been spread to discourage people from complying with requirements in that regard. In reality, cards constitute the first step for citizenship verification. Card holders who meet requirements in accordance with the existing law will become Myanmar citizens within a few months. All persons residing in Myanmar have to go through the same process of verification, myself included.

We will continue to implement the recommendations of the Annan report at the fullest extent, in keeping with the situation on the ground, to bring long-term peace, harmony and development to the people of Rakhine.

The international community, including the United Nations, should work together to create an environment conducive to restoring peace, harmony and development for all people in Rakhine state. Hate narratives that promote deep-rooted mistrust must stop. The prevailing hostile attitude towards the Myanmar Government will not contribute to building peace and harmony in the country. We have just heard a few very hostile and hateful remarks with respect to my country. That is very unfortunate. Discriminatory treatment and one-sided support will lead only to further polarization and escalation of tensions among different communities in the region.

Bangladesh must cooperate fully and sincerely with Myanmar in the implementation of the bilateral agreement for the repatriation of displaced persons. We are confident that we will be able to resolve the

present humanitarian problem and the issues of long-term peace and development of Rakhine state if Myanmar and Bangladesh work hand in hand in a spirit of mutual respect, genuine desire to help the displaced persons and a spirit of good-neighbourliness. In that connection, I am pleased to inform the Council that the joint working group for the repatriation of the displaced persons will meet in Dhaka on 17 May to expedite the implementation of the agreed repatriation process.

I would like to conclude by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation to the members of the Council that have been extending their support to Myanmar at this challenging time of transition to democracy. We also thank our four neighbours for accepting our invitation to travel to Myanmar with the Council members. We believe that mutual understanding and constructive cooperation will ultimately bring about the positive result to which we all aspire.

I would like to reassure the Council that, notwithstanding all the daunting challenges we are facing, the Government of Myanmar will spare no effort to bring peace, harmony and development to all people in Rakhine state.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this briefing and for giving us an opportunity to take the floor.

We appreciate the efforts made by the Security Council to visit Bangladesh and Myanmar to witness at first hand the evolving Rohingya humanitarian crisis. It has been generally acknowledged that the visit left indelible impressions on those who were part of the team. The Council reaffirmed its custodianship of this issue through its meaningful engagements and pronouncements during the visit. We thank in particular the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait, Peru and the United Kingdom for leading the visit and for their respective briefings this afternoon.

Our Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reaffirmed Bangladesh's steadfast commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya and to remaining engaged with Myanmar in good faith to implement the bilateral agreements concluded between our two Governments. Yet, mindful of the limits of our bilateral engagement with Myanmar under the present circumstances, the Prime Minister and other dignitaries conveyed four expectations to the Council, which I now paraphrase: first, continued and decisive action to ensure the safe and sustainable return of the Rohingya; secondly, adoption of a Security Council draft resolution building on the presidential statement adopted last year (S/PRST/2017/22); thirdly, prevailing on Myanmar to unconditionally implement the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State; and, fourthly, ensuring accountability and justice.

We note that the Council's press statement adopted following the visit (SC/13351) makes reference to some of those issues. For those of us used to the dynamics of the intergovernmental processes at the United Nations, it may be somewhat comprehensible that a consensus-based press statement can be circumscribed in its aspirations. However, it is difficult to explain such dynamics to the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who unequivocally voiced their concerns and expectations to the visiting Council members.

We are aware of the Council's scheduled programme to hold consultations immediately after this briefing. I shall therefore limit myself to making four specific points.

First, there should not be any doubt that the voluntary, safe and dignified return of the Rohingya to their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state is an objective shared among all Member States. But voluntary repatriation does not only entail the formation of a few high-profile committees without any demonstrable outcome and the erection of some reception centres almost in the middle of nowhere. In their briefings, the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait and the United Kingdom clearly alluded to the prevailing uncertainty. The issue of incomplete forms shared with the Myanmar side is but one manifestation of that.

The Rohingya need to get concrete answers to some of the fundamental questions about the Myanmar authorities' immediate-to-long-term plans with regard to their citizenship, freedom of movement, human rights and socioeconomic development. It would facetious to claim readiness for repatriation to start at the soonest while there is no plausible response yet for the ways the Rohingya can be assured of an end to their systematic persecution, dehumanization and dispossession in Myanmar. The aerial views of large tracts of burned villages and obliterated homes in nearly 400 villages in northern Rakhine state hardly evoke confidence among the Rohingya about the prospect for return

to their homes in Rakhine state. On their behalf, the relevant United Nations agencies should be able to vouch for a situation conducive to their safe, dignified and sustainable return.

It is crucial that the provisions of the bilateral arrangement between the Government of Myanmar and the relevant United Nations agencies are transparently shared with the Rohingya and other affected communities. It is crucial that the 4,000 to 5,000 Rohingya taking shelter along the border, which Council members witnessed, be repatriated and that the existing camps for internally displaced persons be dismantled in order to generate confidence among the Rohingya regarding their safe and dignified return.

The Myanmar Minister for Social Welfare, during his visit to the camps in Cox's Bazar, added to confusion among the Rohingya about prospects for their so-called resettlement and verification. It is also worth noting that the Myanmar side refrains from mentioning the real ethnic affiliation of those it has claimed to have verified. It is typical of the Myanmar authorities to shift the blame by twisting narratives. It is unfortunate that the Permanent Representative of Myanmar continued that trend today regarding the question of developments along the border. He also shared some fabricated narratives about the presence of terrorists and violent extremists in the camps, which could be considered evidence of the ongoing attitude of the Myanmar authorities towards the forcibly displaced Rohingya.

Secondly, the international concern over the impending monsoon and its potential adverse impact on the forcibly displaced Rohingya is indeed timely and useful. We shared with Council members a brief account of the preparedness measures undertaken so far. In addition to the 5,800 acres of land allocated for the Rohingya so far, our Government has allocated 500 acres for the relocation of extremely vulnerable members of the group. The Government is in the process of finding more land for safe relocations, and the local administration remains seized with that issue. A total of 480 Rohingya have been trained as volunteers by the cyclone-preparedness programme for emergency response.

Thirdly, on the question of accountability, we hear the voices being raised loud and clear. We are following with interest the request by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for a ruling from the Court's Pre-Trial Division on the ICC's jurisdiction over the forced deportation of the Rohingya to a State party to the Rome Statute. In view of the obstruction being faced by the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur and the fact-finding mission, there is a suggestion gaining ground in favour of setting up a so-called triple-I mechanism — an international, impartial and independent mechanism — to undertake an independent and impartial investigation and gather evidence in a coordinated fashion.

It is evident that the Rohingya have a legitimate demand for breaking the culture of impunity as a critical confidence-building measure. My Council colleagues who visited the camps recently will perhaps recall the numerous lost, traumatized and emaciated faces they witnessed on people holding placards and banners calling for justice and accountability for the egregious crimes committed against them. We believe that they would have listened to the Council today about the Myanmar authorities' invitation to submit allegations of crimes committed against them to Myanmar courts. However, that invitation raises the question of how the Rohingya would be able to gain access to the judicial system in Myanmar when the issue of their citizenship remains unresolved.

Fourthly, and lastly, it is perhaps high time for the Council to consider working towards a resolution on the situation in Myanmar. The way the crisis has evolved so far makes it abundantly clear that the Council should remain engaged with this issue on a regular and periodic basis. The Myanmar leadership has reportedly underscored the need for time to address the underlying root causes of the crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine state. The Council should certainly recognize the importance of having a resolution to accompany Myanmar in that process, including by voicing its support for the work of the Secretary-General's newly appointed Special Envoy on Myanmar. We urge Council members to seriously reflect on this possibility during its consultations later this afternoon.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.